



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

The Wise Will Seek Him - The Epiphany - 132021

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Wise Will Seek Him.

Once upon a time, there were three men who were gazing at the stars. They had gathered that night just as they had every month for years. They were not afraid of the darkest nights, even though darkness was the sign of what the evil spirit had brought into the world. These men gathered at night to see the inbreaking of light that happened in the dark, proof of a Wise Lord, who would fight the disorder and chaos that threatened all of creation by an evil lord.

They gathered at night because as keepers of their faith, priests of Zoroastrianism, they wanted to commune with the Wise Lord who would share with them the knowledge they had been given a gift to interpret. So they gathered that night to see the magnificent stars.

The night started out like any other, as they scanned the night skies, they noted how the stars shifted. And they marked the times when auspicious events could happen based on the location of the moon and the stars and the sun. This would help their people make sound decisions. They interpreted the night skies for they revealed to them what could be known about the day.

They were not sure who saw the strange new star at first, but it did not take long for each of them to grow in excitement, a new star! It could only mean that the Wise Lord was breaking into the world to help fight the power of evil. The new star was a sign that something greater than ever was happening on earth. Millennia later, astronomers will claim that Jupiter and Saturn aligned together to cause the burst of light that appeared in the night sky so long ago, but these men were astrologers. They did not need to know how the stars came about. They answered why.

And this star meant the impossible had happened. The one who could break the cycle of evil and darkness had come into the world. None of them slept that night. They consulted the ancient texts. They measured the distance of the star and noted its location. They spoke of what their ancestors had taught them and they knew the star pointed to a ruler in the West who would bring about peace and harmony in the midst of pain and discord.

As they gazed the location, they were surprised to find it land over Jerusalem. The Jews were not friends of theirs. They frowned upon their ways, saying they practiced the dark arts and were tricksters. Nevertheless, they trusted their Wise Lord to reveal to them the plan for the ages. The King of the Jews was the one who was chosen and would change the world for good.

They made the decision as the dawn broke. They wanted to travel to Jerusalem to see for themselves the new King who was born. So they packed up their bags and gathered the provisions for the long journey from Baghdad, and prepared their camels to set out on almost the two month long trek to Jerusalem.

It was a last minute decision to bring the gifts. Truth be told it wasn't even their decision, their wives sometimes wiser than they were, although they would never admit it, said to them, "You do not greet a King without offering gifts." So they each brought the best they had to offer, but they also knew the hidden meaning behind each gift. The gift of gold signifying to the King they knew he was the pinnacle of achievement in humankind and thus deserves the most valuable gift humankind had to offer; frankincense, an offering usually reserved for worshiping the Lord, but given to this new King to provide tangible evidence that this one was sent by the Lord; and myrrh, the most cryptic gift of all reserved for the dead, for they knew the fate of this King would be to face the worst of all humanity, and there would be a terrible price to pay.

They were surprised when they arrived in Jerusalem. There was no celebration in the streets. There was no fanfare. They could detect no excitement from the Jewish people. It was as if nothing extraordinary had happened. The men were confused. Had they misinterpreted the star? Did they read the location wrong? Finally, one of them suggested they ask the people. So they began to inquire. They asked the Jews at the inn, the market, the bazaar, the temple soldiers, "Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews, for we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage?" The people of Jerusalem looked shocked and confused and, truth be told, a little frightened.

"We have a King," they all said. "His name is Herod, and he has allowed us to live peaceably in the Roman Empire." The Magi were insistent. They knew they saw a star that was not there before. They knew it pointed to Jerusalem. So they redoubled their efforts. "No," they said, "it is not your present king to which we refer, but the new one born, where is He?"

One of the soldiers loyal to King Herod smelled insurrection and revolution, and told his commanding officer, it did not take long for the word to get to Herod himself. It was the greatest fear Herod had. Rumors are one thing, but these men were from the East and were conjurers practicing the dark arts. Could they know something that his spies did not? A prophecy, another King of the Jews? He was troubled to his core. Something told him this threat was one to take heed, but

how could he find out where this new one, destined to usurp his throne, would be?

His military could not give him any clues. They had no intel about peasants celebrating a birth. Then it dawned on him. He was told that the men inquiring about the birth, whereas the Zoroastrian priests, his own priests would know if there was to be a new King of their people and where the King would be born.

Truth be told, the chief priests and the scribes were as troubled to hear what their king said, the Messiah born now? But why did they not know? Why could they not interpret the signs and what a time for the Messiah to come. Their temple was doing just fine. They had found a way to live with the Romans and they were at peace in the land. They did not appreciate those who kept speaking of a Messiah to come to overthrow the Roman rule. A Messiah today was the stuff of dreams. They lived in the real world. And one had to take the bad with the good. And these chief priests had mastered living with compromise under Roman rule and keeping the people in order, everything was working just fine. They did not need a Messiah to save them. They did not need saving.

Nevertheless, the king asked, where was it said that the Messiah would be born? It was one of the younger scribes who provided the response. Still wide-eyed, still without guile, that one still believing God was going to make a new way, he told them what the prophet Micah said, "But you Bethlehem though, you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

The young scribe continued excitedly, "Oh, and what a Messiah He will be! Listen to what it says after that. He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, His God, and they will live securely for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth." The chief priest's concern grew. This was not to be trifled. They immediately told Herod, "Bethlehem," they said, and they knew Herod would take care of it.

The Magi were at first surprised when the Roman soldier asked them to come to the palace, but the soldier assured them Herod did indeed know about the new King and was eager to share the news with the visiting Magi. So they went, excited that they were that much closer to meeting the one whom the star whispered to them.

It was quiet when they came to the palace, they were ushered into Herod's private chambers, where they met the King of the Jews. "I am delighted the prophecies of the saving Messiah are coming true," King Herod told the Magi. We know He is to be born in Bethlehem, but tell me, when did you first see the star that foretold this great event?

The Magi shared with Herod the joys of watching the night sky and what it revealed to them and Herod listened carefully. He then said to the Wise Men go and search diligently for the child. And when you have found Him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay Him homage.

The Magi left the palace with great hope. What an affirmation! Even though it seemed that the people didn't know about the birth of the new King, the priests and the current King of the Jews knew, and they knew where. Bethlehem was not far from Jerusalem, even though it was dark. And they set out at once to go to see the new King, bearing their gifts. Just as the three were heading out, one of them said, "Look up!" They saw once again, the star that had begun their long journey back home, it was a sign from their wise Lord, they were on the right paths.

So they went to Bethlehem. And the star led the way moving alongside them. Finally, the star positioned itself over a small, modest abode, and it stopped. And all three of them stopped too. They couldn't believe it. All their lives they had watched the stars just as their ancestors had. All their lives, they had hoped that the stars told them what they needed to know from realms unseen. And then this star appeared and they took a great gamble and followed it. They came to foreign lands, spoke with the most powerful leader of the land, and made their way to a small insignificant town of no consequence. And under that star was a child who would forever change the world. And they were the ones who found out. They were chosen first to worship the one who would save them. Later on, those who had retell their story would say it this way. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Though it was late, the father answered the door and welcomed the strange visitors. He did not look surprised nor frightened that these foreigners were at his home. It seemed the father knew about his son and did not hesitate to let them meet the boy he called Jesus. Joseph told him his son's name means "God Saves." The wise men knew this was the truth. When the Magi finally laid eyes on the little boy named Jesus, the indescribable exaltation they felt was so overwhelming that they danced and sang and spilled their treasures out and laughed and cried. And they did one more thing. They knelt.

Centuries later, good people of faith like you and me would depict these traveling men as visiting a baby in a manger, offering their gifts to a newborn. And even though it did not happen quite like that, even though the child was growing past infancy in his own home, none of that matters. What the good people like you and me who believe know is that it was these foreigners, these Iraqis, these men of a different faith who first knelt down and experienced the gift of worshiping God in the flesh.

They met the one who became one of us and their joy was complete and real. And the same gift has been given to us. May we be as wise as they were and seek the one who has been given to us, may we follow the light no matter the cost. And when it stops, may we be overwhelmed with joy and may we dance and sing and share our treasures and laugh and cry. And yes, may we kneel when we are found by the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Lords, our very own savior, the perfect light, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[End of Recording]